

## **PUBLIC NOTICE**

Kenai National Wildlife Refuge invites public comment on a compatibility determination on the continuation and temporary alteration of the Hidden Lake Sockeye Salmon Enhancement Project. The current project operates under the stipulations of a Refuge Special Use Permit issued to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (Department) and is conducted by the Cook Inlet Aquaculture Association (CIAA). The basic project, in operation for approximately 29 years, provides for the collection of adult salmon from Hidden Lake in autumn and caring for fertilized eggs and resulting fry in Trail Lakes Hatchery until released back into the lake in spring. This practice substantially increases survival of fry and the number of returning adults in the future. Current practices require the collection of approximately 660 adult sockeye salmon from Hidden Lake in order to take approximately 800,000 eggs. This amount of egg take is designed to return approximately 30,000 adults, after harvest, to Hidden Lake in three years time (one year rearing in freshwater and two in saltwater). The project provided an average of approximately 75,000 fish annually in recent years for subsistence, personal use, recreational, and commercial fisheries. Without enhancement, it is estimated that Hidden Lake would naturally produce 6,000 to 7,000 or fewer returning adult sockeye salmon each year.

The Department is requesting an amendment to their permit to allow a temporary increase in egg take from Hidden Lake. This temporary take would replace brood stock no longer available to CIAA for Lower Cook Inlet Lakes Sockeye Salmon Projects (due to the December 2003 Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruling against the Tustumena Lake Sockeye Salmon Enhancement Project). Specifically, the Department requests authorization to collect an additional approximately 4,000 adult sockeyes in order to take an additional approximately 5 million eggs each year until 2008 or 2009. These additional eggs would be used to stock Lower Cook Inlet Lake Projects (Kirschner, Hazel, and Leisure Lakes) and to establish a returning brood stock of sockeye salmon to Tutka Bay Lagoon. After 2008 or 2009, the salmon returning to Tutka Bay Lagoon would be used for future stocking of the Lower Cook Inlet Lakes Projects and the additional egg take from Hidden Lake cease. While Hidden Lake is located within Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, Kirschner, Hazel, and Leisure Lakes, and Tutka Bay Lagoon, are all located well outside of the Refuge. The temporary additional take of adults will remain within the current permit stipulations to return approximately 30,000 adults to Hidden Lake each year.

The National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, as amended, requires that all uses of national wildlife refuges be found compatible with the Refuge System mission and the individual refuge purposes before being permitted, and that the compatibility of permitted uses be reevaluated periodically. Additionally, any significant change in a use requires a new compatibility determination. Because the current compatibility determination for the Hidden Lake Project is due for reevaluation and because the requested temporary increase in egg take is deemed a significant change in the project, an updated compatibility review is required.

A compatible use is defined as a use of a national wildlife refuge that, based on sound professional judgment, will not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the National Wildlife Refuge System mission or the purpose(s) of the national wildlife refuge. Accordingly, the Refuge Manager will evaluate the basic project and temporary changes to the project for compatibility with the established National Refuge System mission and purposes for which the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge was established. The Refuge System mission is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans. The established purposes for Kenai National Wildlife Refuge include: (i) to conserve fish and wildlife populations and habitats in their natural diversity including, but not limited to, moose, bears, mountain goats, Dall sheep, wolves and other furbearers, salmonoids and other fish, waterfowl and other migratory and non-migratory birds; (ii) to fulfill the international treaty obligations of the United States with respect to fish and wildlife and their habitats; (iii) to ensure, to the maximum extent practicable and in a manner consistent with the purposes set forth in (i) above water quality and necessary quantity within the Refuge; (iv) to provide in a manner consistent with (i) and (ii) above opportunities for scientific research, interpretation, environmental education, and land management training; and (v) to provide in a manner compatible with these purposes, opportunities for fish and wildlife-oriented recreation.

The Refuge Manager invites public comment on how the proposed use is compatible or is not compatible with the specific Refuge purposes or Refuge System mission. Comments must be received by September 9, 2005 to be considered. Comments may be mailed to: Refuge Manager, Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, P.O. Box 2139, Soldotna, Alaska 99669; or by fax to (907) 262-3599 (attention Refuge Manager); or by e-mail to <[robin\\_west@fws.gov](mailto:robin_west@fws.gov)>. To find out the results of the compatibility determination, or obtain a copy, contact the Refuge after September 14, 2005. Additionally, an Environmental Assessment (EA) detailing the proposed use is now available from the Refuge. To receive a copy of the EA, or for additional information on the compatibility determination process, please contact the Refuge at the above address or call (907) 262-7021.